

Framework for the Asbestos Action Plan

Introduction

For over three decades, a variety of Federal agencies have been overseeing the regulation of asbestos products, wastes, and emissions. Existing EPA regulations address asbestos risks from non-household products which are designed to contain asbestos; point source emissions from facilities where these products are manufactured; and sites where environmental contamination pose a risk to local populations (outside the workplace). Other Federal Agencies also regulate asbestos. For example, the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) regulates and the National Institute on Occupational Safety & Health (NIOSH) monitors asbestos exposure through workplace activities. The US Geological Survey and the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) monitor and regulate asbestos-related mining activities. The Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) can also regulate asbestos in products in the home. In 1989 EPA finalized the Asbestos Ban and Phaseout rule which would have banned all but a few uses of asbestos. Citing certain procedural errors in the rulemaking process by EPA, this ban was reversed by the courts in 1991. As a result, in the late 1980's and 90's EPA's asbestos program focused primarily on implementing the Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act (AHERA) and the Asbestos School Hazard Abatement Act (ASHAA).

EPA is committed to providing accurate and timely asbestos information and continuing to address public health concerns about asbestos. The Agency has identified three key areas for focus:

- 1) Improving the state of the science for asbestos;
- 2) Identifying and addressing exposure and risk reduction opportunities associated with asbestos in products, and
- 3) Reducing existing risks through contaminated site cleanups.

Improving the State of the Science for Asbestos

EPA and its Federal partners will enhance the scientific understanding of asbestos (and other durable fibers) by reviewing existing definitions, analytical methods, human health effects, and options to mitigate exposure. To ensure that the Agency's actions are based on the most up-to-date scientific information, EPA is developing a comprehensive Asbestos Research Plan. Some of the activities EPA plans to pursue include:

- 1) defining categories of asbestos and asbestos-like fibers to be addressed in risk assessments;
- 2) evaluating existing measurement procedures for asbestos and other fibers (and developing new methods if necessary);
- 3) assessing the toxicity, exposure and risk assessment for cancer and non-cancer effects associated with asbestos as documented in the Agency's Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS); and

- 4) assessing options to reduce or mitigate exposures.

As our understanding of asbestos improves, the Agency will use this information to enhance its efforts to prevent or reduce asbestos-related risks.

Identifying and Addressing Exposure and Risk Reduction Opportunities Associated with Asbestos in Products

Domestic commercial production of asbestos has decreased from 150,000 tons in 1973 to zero in 2003 (the last domestic mine closed in 2002). U.S. consumption of asbestos also peaked in 1973 at 885,000 tons. Current estimates are that over 10,000 tons of imported asbestos is contained within certain non-household products (roofing products, gaskets, friction products and coatings and compounds are the largest uses) every year. EPA will develop a variety of options for addressing exposure and risk reduction opportunities associated with asbestos in products. This effort may involve reviewing the distribution of, need for, and substitutes for these intentional asbestos products, as well as evaluating currently unregulated products containing asbestos as a contaminant. Based on the findings from the updated science and the improved understanding of products, EPA will examine opportunities for reducing the risks from asbestos. These options can span from public awareness campaigns and encouraging product stewardship, to proposing voluntary withdrawal of products, redesign of products to be asbestos-free, providing enforcement incentives, proposing rulemaking, or seeking legislation to ban asbestos in products.

Reducing Asbestos Exposures through Contaminated Sites Cleanup

EPA has on-going clean up operations in Libby, Montana where a now closed vermiculite mine has been the main source of contamination. EPA is actively involved in assessing contamination at the numerous plants which processed the contaminated ore from Libby. EPA and its partner ATSDR will continue to review cancer registries of localities where exposure to the Libby asbestos fibers have occurred.

Soliciting Public Input

The EPA and other federal organizations are currently facing a number of issues related to asbestos and asbestos-contaminated vermiculite in particular. In response to these issues, EPA has taken several steps to respond, including: a public awareness campaign, various response actions, technical studies and peer/expert consultations. As a result of these efforts, various research needs have been identified. In the next several months, EPA will make available a draft asbestos action plan for public consideration.